

San Diego DX Club Bulletin

May 2016



Manufacturing New DXCC “Countries” in the South China Sea



MAY PROGRAM

**Journey to the Edge - The 2016 VP8 DXpeditions to
South Sandwich and South Georgia Islands**

MEETING NOTICE:

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25, 2016

**JOIN US AT THE SIZZLER, 3755 Murphy Canyon Road,
San Diego, CA 92123 (858) 278-6988**

SOCIAL HOUR, 5:00 P.M. DINNER, 5:30 P.M.

MEETING, 6:30 P.M

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From the Prez . . .

John Vissat, NA6L



What you gonna' do when the bands go dead?

Knowing the most of us are devoted to very long distance radio communications, it is still possible to work DX and even entertain ourselves with other objectives during the worst of the solar cycle. As I get ready to depart for the Dayton HAM love-in, here are a few thoughts:

- Continue to work DX during the big contests when many of the international stations are on the air. Even with terrible solar conditions the bands seem to come alive with signals when the big dogs are on. A big DX station with a talented operator will even defy the ionosphere. If you do not compete in the "TEST" you can still catch some great DX and hand out a few points -- AND, they really want to work you! As an example here is the June Contest "Corral" from the ARRL as a PDF. [Contest Link](#)
- Use the lower bands. Even in the worst conditions the lower bands can give good results. When you find that your radio just makes a hissing noise from 10m down to 17m, try 160m and up to 20m to get surprisingly good results. Have some fun with the lower bands by improving your band counts or knocking off your 40/80/160m DXCC.
- Here some small lot lowband antenna ideas. This is a 160m [Helical Wound Vertical](#) from John K6MM who spoke at our club. If you want to find more options (DIY and premade) for other 160/80m designs just do a Bing/Google search using [Small 160m antennas](#) .
- Concentrate your efforts on the Sunrise and Sunset times of the day (greyline). The paths created during greyline conditions can yield some amazing results. Because I often get up early in the morning my routine goes something like this: First I visit the "library" (you old guys know about this), then one or two hours prior to our local SR (see your QRZ page for your sunrise time) I start listening around on 160m (or let JT65/9 - JTAAlert do the work) and at about 20 or 30 minutes prior to local SR, I switch to 80m and right after SR go to 40m. I'm often happily surprised at what appears out of the static -- and then just as quickly disappears again. Although 160m can have plenty of QRN during our summer it is possible to have JT65 QSOs with ZL/VK and South America during our summer months (Winter in the Southern Hemisphere).

From the Prez (cont'd) . . .

- Use more CW, PSK and JT65/JT9 for extra range. When there is nothing available on SSB or RTTY, try the modes that have longer "legs". Remember from our recent SDDXC presentation that JT65 can have 12 times the range of even robust CW signals? Yeah, it is slow but better than nothing ;-)
- Try 6m terrestrial DXing. TEP conditions and/or "cloud linking" events can provide some great opportunities for ZL/VK/JA and South American stations, even EU station are within reach during certain 6m conditions.
- Explore EME (Earth Moon Earth) for ultimate range. You can make global contacts by using the moon as your signal "trampoline". More and more DXpeditions are bringing 6m gear along on their trips to make EME and terrestrial contacts -- if nothing else works, the moon could be our best friend. By using a simple (non-elevating) Yagi at moonrise and/or moonset it is possible to get DXCC on 2m and 6m Here is a step by step [guide](#) from my pal Lance W7GJ about what to do next.
- When "Normal" people (non HAM) naively ask "what is the longest distance you have ever talked on your radio ?" I get to answer, "Oh, about 480,000 miles -- that is, to the moon and back".
- While you are waiting for the right conditions to allow opening the London repeater on 10m FM, try some non-DX fun. You can enjoy the many fun shorter range events and related award programs like [State QSO parties](#) or [National Parks On The Air](#) (NPOTA). Or try working all states on all bands and on all modes, or even the [Triple Play Award program](#) by working all 50 states on all three modes - just because you can.

John, NA6L

Dear all the Members of San Diego DX Club

Hello, Fellow DX-ers and Contesters!

We are pleased to announce that the quasi-biennial Asia Pacific DX Convention (APDXC) will be held this year on November 11-13 in Osaka, Japan.

In addition to the usual presentations on recent DXpeditions, technical sessions, DX dinners and so forth, we will also have the opportunity to join a tour at the Icom factory and participate in a technical session led by the Icom HF radio design team.

And don't forget, APDXC is the only amateur radio event in Japan where all the programs are conducted in English!

During the hours of the Icom factory tour, the non-ham members of your party will have the opportunity for a day of guided sightseeing and exploring in the Osaka-Kyoto-Nara area.

We look forward to seeing you at the APDXC 2016, and we appreciate your introducing this convention to your DX/contest club members. For more details, please visit the APDXC website at:

<http://www.apdxc.org/>

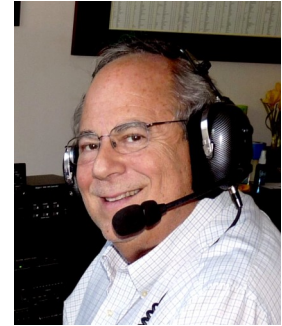
For convention updates, check our website often, or send an email to subscribe to the APDXC newsletter.

APDXC Committee / JA3USA

Vice President Report

Howard, W6HDG

One of the ham radio greats became a silent key on May 13. Dave Bell, W6AQ, 84, was a past SDDXC member and former SCDXC President who moved to Leucadia a few years ago after a very successful career in Hollywood. He was an award winning documentary filmmaker, winning both Peabody and Emmy awards. Dave was born in Andover, Ohio in 1932 and became a ham in 1951, the year I was born!



We all knew him as a Hollywood producer of three excellent ham radio documentaries and as the MC at several of our ARRL SW Division and DX Conventions over the years. But did you know that Dave is credited as being a pioneer in Reality TV in the 80's? He produced shows about hookers, skinheads, missing persons, and the LAPD. Publicist Cynthia Shapiro writes, "Anyone over 50 who has worked in reality TV at some point worked for or with Dave Bell. Dave gave hundreds of directors, producers, writers, editors and production crew the opportunity to prove themselves in the reality TV business and effectively launched their careers. And he embodied the qualities that matter most in any business and in life: generosity, fairness, wisdom and, above all, kindness." In fact, one of Dave's show interns, Bonnie Hammer is now the Chairman of NBC Universal Cable. She says, "(Dave) was ahead of his time as a social documentarian".



Jim McCook W6YA, who was Dave's friend (and Dentist!) reminded me to click on #10 in this link, <http://www.imdb.com/company/co0033679/> where you can review the film that won him the Emmy: Do you Remember Love about Alzheimer's starring Joanne Woodward and Richard Kiley.

Dave's legacy in ham radio is monumental. His films about the hobby will live on: Ham's Wide World, narrated by Sen. Barry Goldwater; Amateur Radio Today, featuring Walter Cronkite; and Amateur Radio's Newest Frontier, with King Hussein of Jordan QSO'ing with astronaut Owen Garriott as the space shuttle Columbia passed over Jordan.

If you want to learn more about Dave, read his QRZ page and pick up a copy of his memoir, World's Best Hobby available on Amazon.

Dave is survived by his wife of 61 years, Alice (Sam), four children, four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

73, Gud DX and remember Dave as you too promote our wonderful Hobby,

Howard, W6HDG

Secretary/Treasurer Reports

Ellen, N6UWW



The meeting was called to order at 6:30PM by John, NA6L, at the Sizzler Restaurant.

Visitors - W6BJB, Brad (and better half, Debbie), Dennis, KI6TUC.

Old Business - none.

New Business - DXer of the Year was awarded to Howard Groveman. John K6AM announced Top Ten for 17m and 12m.

Roundtable discussion was followed by a presentation on JT65 by John NA6L.

Treasurer's Report

Statement Balance 4/29/2016 \$6601.46

Activity since statement

\$300 liability insurance paid

\$20 CA Statement of Information filing fee paid

Please note: The Club needs to find another Secretary/Treasurer as I will not be continuing past June 2016. More signers need to be added to the bank account (Leon N6VS has moved out of the area).

Ellen, N6UWW

SDDXC RESULTS 2015 ARRL SWEEPSTAKES PHONE CONTEST

CLASS	CALL	SCORE	QSO'S	MLTS	
MS - HP	W6YI (+K6AM, N6AN, N6MJ, N6KI)	362,710	2,185	83	#1 US/VE #1 all categories
MS - LP	NX6T (N6KI, N0DY, N6CY, WB6NBU, KB7V, N6ERD, W6JBR, W2PWS, ops)	120,350	725	83	#1 SW DIV #12 US/VE
SO - LP	WN6K	128,904	786	82	#2 SW DIV #10 US/VE
SO - UL	KK6NON	49,928	316	79	
SO - UL	W6JBR	6,624	72	46	

THE SDDXC TOP 10

By John, K6AM

TOTAL COUNTRIES WORKED ON 17 METERS

5/16	5/15	CALL	ZNS	C-D	CFM	WKD	CHG
1.	1.	W6YA	40	?	?	341	+2
2.	2.	K6AM	40	325	332	337	+3
3.	4.	K6XT	40	306	308	328	+5
4.	3.	N7CW	40	312	312	326	-
5.	5.	K0XB	40	308	311	314	+1
6.	6.	W6YI	39	285	287	310	-
7.	7	K6ZH	39	271	273	297	-
8.	8	N6CW	39	?	231	297	-
9.	9.	WB6BFG	39	282	284	293	+4
10.	10.	W6YOO	37	281	286	286	+6

TOTAL COUNTRIES WORKED ON 12 METERS

5/16	5/15	CALL	ZNS	C-D	CFM	WKD	CHG
1.	1.	W6YA	40	?	?	328	+1
2.	2.	K6AM	40	308	314	321	+2
3.	3.	N7CW	40	260	260	300	-
4.	4.	K6XT	40	266	267	293	+4
5.	5.	W6YI	39	256	258	292	-
6.	6.	K0XB	39	283	285	286	+2
7.	7.	N6CW	39	?	192	268	-
8.	8.	WB6BFG	40	247	249	263	+9
9.	9.	NA6L	39	245	245	256	+10
10.	-.	WN6K	39	216	217	245	NEW

With more than half our players reporting in, we are seeing steady gains on both bands despite fading conditions. The big winner this month is John, NA6L, with 10 new ones on 12, but not enough to catch Wild Bill, WB6BFG, who keeps pace with him. As cycle 24 heads down the back side, these bands have been very productive. There were a few EU openings on 12 in the past few months. 17 remains a very viable band and should continue for several more years to come.

Both of these lists are much easier to break into than the other bands. If you're not playing the WARC bands, you're missing a chance to experience the thrill of working a new one several times every month. The little Cushcraft WARC dipole is all you need to get started. The newer Force 12 Antennas work on 12 and 17 with a couple dB of gain as well.

Each month, we will publish top ten lists for one of the lesser recognized but hard won categories. Coming up next, 160 meters, RTTY and band-countries. Please send me your totals for each band throughout the year and you will be listed in coming months. Use the convenient form at <http://www.sddxc.org> or bring 'em to the meeting.

PLEASE NOTE: Kingman reef, KH5K is no longer a current entity effective March 29. Make sure all future reports reflect its move from current to deleted status. If your latest report was before that date, I will assume you have KH5K worked and automatically reduce your C-D totals by one in the next few months.

John, K6AM

From the Editor



Bob, K9RHY

We sat in silence for a moment. We hadn't bothered to tell the QRPer that we'd tucked the BS7H in the log early one morning on 20-metres before he got up. We had a slightly different opinion on the Minimum Size rule and its application to Scarborough Reef! We wondered if we were in keeping with the amateur's code as we dug out our QSTs to see how many W6s were on the DXAC! DXing is war! Survival of the fittest is our motto. DX IS! And DX IS! even more when we've worked it and the QRPer hasn't! As Albert so often said, "Everything is relative, some things more so . . ."

From: DX IS—If You Worked It: DX Stories by Paul M. Dunphy, VE1DX

Why I Wrote this Story

Frankly, when the first Scarborough Reef, BS7H, operation came on the air at 0928Z on 12 April, 1995, I was skeptical. Much earlier, the 7J1RL operation in May, 1976, and the JF1ST/7J1 operation in June, 1979 similarly raised my eyebrows. Since then, as an avid DXer, the idea of new DXCC entities in this part of the world has regularly piqued my interest.

About a dozen years ago, I started visiting Asia on business on a fairly regular basis. I've had the immense pleasure of meeting people in Japan, China, Viet Nam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippines, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and other cool places. I've made almost 30 trips to Singapore (one of my favorite destinations in the world) and had a wonderful time every time (Pepper Crab and Lobster Laksa are among my favorite treats as is Sim Lim Square).

Finally, China has been in the news lately because it is expanding its interests in the South China Sea for economic, defensive, territorial and other reasons.

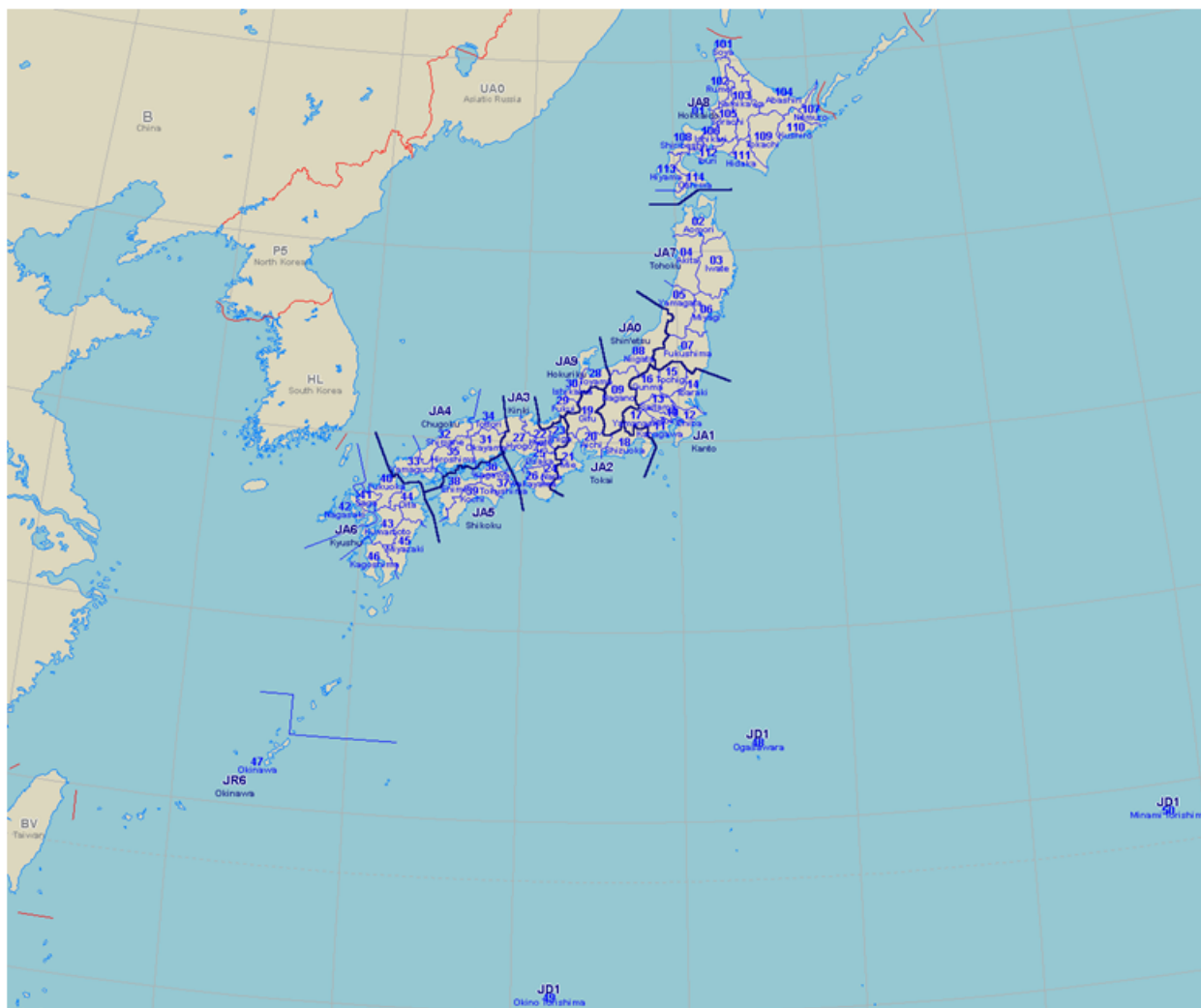
These interests have intersected to generate the motivation behind this short narrative.

A Short History of "Scaffold Islands"

Back in the late 1970s, now-deleted Okino Tori-Shima held DXCC separate country status, and used scaffold platforms to keep the stations above rising sea levels at high tide. Although officially in the East China Sea (and not the South China Sea), this was the first known (to me) "scaffold" DXCC operation to take place .

Okino Tori-Shima is shown at the south-most point on a Japanese Prefecture map. Okino Tori-Shima is now considered part of Ogasawara (JD1) for DXCC purposes.





But the “scaffold country” best known to current DXers is, of course, Scarborough Reef, BS7H, first activated in 1994 and subsequently activated relatively frequently between 1995 and 2014 (according to IOTA spot history).

So thus far, the number of “scaffold” operations has been fairly limited. But is this about to change? And what will the next “scaffold” DXCC country be?



Travels in the South China Sea

So now honing down into the South China Sea DX-spawning ground, I can safely say that Southeast Asia is a great place to work and to be DX. On Phuket Island (HS), I swam in the Andaman Sea. In Kota Kinabalu (9M8) in East Malaysia on the island of Sabah, I enjoyed sightseeing in the jungles of Borneo and rode the North Borneo Railway, a steam train powered by burning sugar cane.

Kota Kinabalu is easily reached via Malaysia or Singapore Airlines and is a great starting point for further adventures in the South China Sea.

Two of my travel destinations were Sidapan Island about 300km east of Kota Kinabalu and Lyang Lyang, about 300 km to the west.

Lyang Lyang is on Swallow Island which is part of the Spratly group of islands. Short flight. Been there, done that but no tee-shirt.

DXCC Entities in the China Seas

Spratly Islands

From: "The South China Sea – The Struggle for Power in Asia" by Bill Hayton:

"The sea had been Richard Spratly's destiny from an early age. Born in the shadow of London's docks to a boat-builder father he was apprenticed to a whaling ship at 16. In 1834, he returned to his first vocation: chasing cetaceans through the South Seas' dangerous rocks and shoals he had encountered. He'd often learnt the hard way: in the spring of 1842 he told a fellow captain that in the many voyages he had made in the seas around what is now Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines he 'had been aground on nearly all these reefs and shoals' at some point. Even a decade later he would write to the Nautical Magazine complaining that he 'never yet could find one chart of this intricate Archipelago to be in the least depended upon'. So it is somewhat ironic that this entire intricate archipelago now bears his name. At 9 a.m. that Wednesday, 29 March 1843, there came a shout from the masthead of the Cyrus. The lookout had spotted a low, sandy island: 12 miles to the southeast. Captain Spratly believed that it was uncharted. Others disagreed, saying the island had already been recorded by the East India Company's surveyor, James Horsburgh, but perhaps in deference to his long experience, the Royal Navy's Hydrographic Office chose to honour Spratly and since 1881 its charts have marked 'Spratly Island'.



It was a fitting honour for an old sea dog, but perhaps in view of later developments, Horsburgh's original name of 'Storm Island' might have been more appropriate. Spratly must have been only one of dozens of European ships' captains to have spotted his 'sandy isle' but he is the one credited with its discovery. It might have been an accident that it was he; but it was much less of an accident that he was British. Britain was the global hegemon, British cartographers were drawing the best maps and British committees were drawing up the rules for naming territory. Thousands of others probably saw Spratly Island during the preceding millennia, perhaps even landed on it, but they left no traces in any written records. The idea that this patch of land, just 750 metres long and 350 metres wide, could actually 'belong' to anyone didn't arise until 1877. It was, unsurprisingly, Great Britain that first claimed it, initiating a process that led ultimately to the disputes of today. Over the century and a half since, claim has been laid upon claim with governments reaching far into the past and the furthest recesses of legal theory in search of evidence and arguments that might make their actions compatible with international law. Unfortunately, in the South China Sea the law is far from clear. There are two sets of laws to contend with: an older form governs 'historical claims' to territory and a newer form, defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), governs the maritime claims that can be measured from territorial claims. The South China Sea is where the two forms intersect – and perhaps collide."

Spratly consistently scores high in surveys of most-wanted countries. And although there have been many expeditions to the Spratlys using various call signs from a number of countries sanctioning the expeditions as well as some "DIY" calls (1S1, 1S9, 1S0, 9M4, 9M6, 9M0, DX0, XV9 and others) it still remains both a wanted DX entity and a disputed chunk of real estate.

Scarborough Reef

Scarborough Reef is a collection of slippery, algae-covered rocks. In the first operation, four different sets of rocks provided a perch for each of four stations. Operators had to jump on and off the rocks from a boat, according to a three shift operating schedule. The entire team of 18 couldn't all fit on the scaffold at the same time.

Nothing lives on Scarborough Reef. But, being inhabited is not a DXCC Criteria. Peter 1 Island in the Antarctic isn't inhabited either nor is Heard Island, although both are large enough to support a large team of intrepid DXpeditioners. Not all members of the DXCC entity list are inhabited by a regular population. But they all must meet Section II of the DXCC List Criteria and Scarborough meets those criteria.

Scarborough Reef's DXCC Country status was first put to the DX Advisory Committee (DXAC) which voted 9-7 against the addition of Scarborough to the List. The ARRL Awards Committee then reviewed the application and the supporting evidence and voted unanimously in favor of adding Scarborough. With the chairmen of the two committees unable to affect a compromise, the matter then went to the Membership Services Committee (MSC), a standing committee of the ARRL Board of Directors.

The MSC requested position papers and documentation from the two committees, and weighed the arguments from both sides. On 19 December 1995, they announced their decision to recommend the addition of Scarborough Reef to the DXCC Countries List by a vote of 5-2. This recommendation then went before the full Board of Directors, which met in plenary session 19 - 20 January 1996 which officially added Scarborough Reef to the DXCC List.

I've had an opportunity to discuss this "process" with members of the DXAC (who typically rule the DXCC list). The consensus I heard was that the addition of Scarborough was a political decision made by the ARRL Board of Directors to please the PRC.

End of that chapter.

Pratas Island

The Pratas Islands, also known as the Dongsha Islands, are an atoll in the north of the South China Sea consisting of three islets about 340 kilometers (211 mi) southeast of Hong Kong. Excluding their associated EEZ and territorial waters, the islets comprise about 590 acres, including 160 acres of lagoon area. The People's Republic of China claims the islands, but the Republic of China (ROC) controls them and has declared them a national park. The main island of the group—Pratas Island—is the largest of the South China Sea Islands.

Only Pratas/Dongsha is always above water; the other two islands forming the rest of the atoll, North and South Vereker, are submerged at high tide. Other than a short Japanese occupation during World War II, Pratas has been Chinese-controlled since at least the Han dynasty. Control over Pratas is currently held by the Republic of China, i.e. Taiwan, and thus is also claimed by the People's Republic of China as part of its integral territory.

Pratas Island, aka Dongsha or Tung Sha Dao, was added to the DXCC countries list In December 1995.

The following announcement was made by ARRL in the ARRL DXCC News Release (ARLD065) of 22 December 1995:

"The ARRL DX Advisory Committee (DXAC) has voted 12 to 4, and the Awards Committee, has voted unanimously to add Pratas Island, BV9P, for contacts made 1 January 1994 and after. This is based on DXCC Rules Section II, Point 2(a) (Separation by Water). Pratas Island, located in the South China Sea, is administered by Taiwan. QSL cards will be received by the DXCC Desk starting April 1, 1996."

Taiwan

Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (ROC) is a sovereign state in East Asia. The Republic of China, originally based in mainland China, has since 1945 governed the island of Taiwan, which constitutes more than 99% of its territory, as well as Penghu, Matsu, and other minor islands, following its loss of the mainland China territory in 1949 in the Chinese Civil War. This remaining area is also called the "Free area of the Republic of China", which is not ruled by the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing although 22 other countries recognize it as a country.

The “Nine-Dash Line” (also called the “U-Shaped Line”) and Disputed Claims in the South China Sea

The “nine-dash” or “nine-segment” line of the South China Sea (also referred to by China as the “U-Shaped Line”) refers to the demarcation line used initially by the government of the Republic of China (ROC / Taiwan), and subsequently also by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), for their claims of the major part of the South China Sea. The contested area in the South China Sea includes the Paracel Islands, the Spratly Islands and various other areas including the Pratas Islands, the Macclesfield Bank and the Scarborough Shoal. The claim encompasses the area of Chinese land reclamation known as the “great wall of sand”.

Despite having made the vague claim public in 1947, China has not filed a formal and specifically defined claim to the area within the dashes. The People's Republic of China added a tenth-dash line to the east of Taiwan island in 2013 as a part of its official sovereignty claim to the disputed territories in the South China Sea

Why this is Important

Without trying to imitate a sea-lawyer, the ownership of “islands” is extremely important.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

As on land, the sea is crossed by boundary lines drawn by people for exploration and use of resources. Generally speaking, the water stretching 12 nautical miles directly off the shoreline is considered sovereign territory of the adjoining country, except that foreign ships (military and civilian) are allowed to pass through it. The first 3 miles off the coast are state waters, meaning that each US state manages and controls use within their own region.

Beyond the territorial sea, is the area where countries have the right to manage and control marine affairs and resources, such as fishing, mineral extraction and oil drilling. This area of ocean, extending 200 nautical miles from a country's coast, is called the **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**.

The USA has jurisdiction over quite a lot of the world's ocean. For example, the US EEZ surrounding the islands of Guam and the Northern Marianas, roughly 5,600 miles from the West Coast of the USA, is home to the Mariana Trench—the deepest place in the ocean. The US EEZ also contains water surrounding American Samoa in the Southern Hemisphere, portions of the Arctic Sea, waters off the Virgin Islands and the Puerto Rico Trench in the Caribbean Sea. In total, the USA has jurisdiction over more of the ocean than land. In fact, the USA has jurisdiction over more ocean than any other country, an area of 4,382,646 square miles (territorial waters plus EEZ).

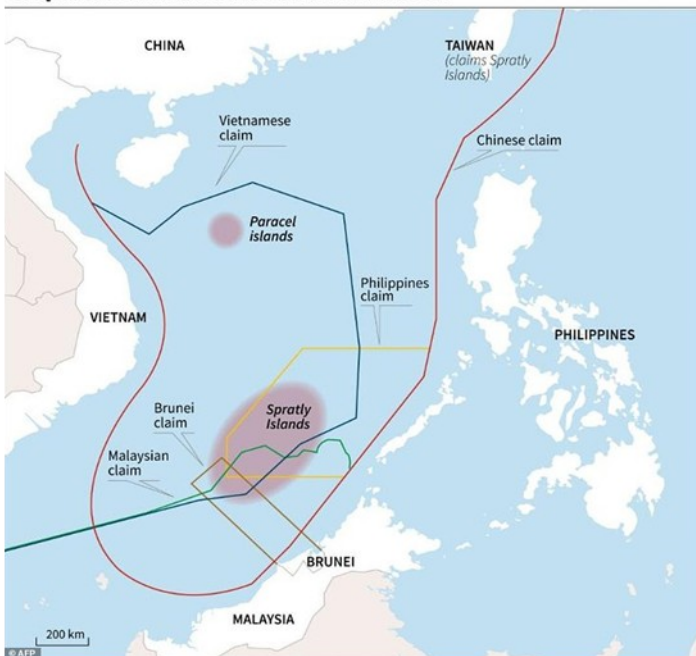
All this maritime law is an outgrowth of the archaic three-mile limit. The three-mile limit originated in the eighteenth century. Previously, states fixed their seaward boundaries at various limits for various purposes, i.e., range of cannon shot for neutrality, range of eyesight for security and one or more marine leagues for fishing. During the late eighteenth century, the French Foreign Office and Italian writers suggested that a uniform limit of three miles might be more suitable. When forced to proclaim a neutral zone in the war between England and France, the United States reluctantly adopted the three-mile limit as a temporary measure in 1793.

Great Britain, perceiving the world-wide advantages that such a narrow international limit of territorial waters would afford her vastly superior merchant, naval, and fishing fleets, adopted that limit for herself. Then with the consensus of the other great powers, Britain championed the three-mile limit to its peak of strength as a rule of international law in the 1920's. Only Russia, devastated by military defeat and civil war, diplomatically ostracized, and possessing no maritime assets, claimed a greater extent, twelve miles.

World War Two saw the return of Russia as a great power. She reaffirmed her twelve-mile claim and many states followed suit. The United States' 1945 proclamations on the continental shelf and fisheries triggered several Latin American states to claims 200-mile limits. The United States, having inherited Britain's role as champion of the three-mile limit, was not in a position to defend it forcibly as had the British.

Maps describing the disputed claims in the South China Sea and the Nine-Dash line follow:

Disputed claims in the South China Sea



The Industrious Chinese

China is hard at work piling sand onto reefs in the South China Sea, creating seven new islets in the region. The speed and scale of China's island-building spree have alarmed other countries with interests in the region. China announced in June that the creation of islands — moving sediment from the seafloor to a reef — would soon be completed. Since then, China has focused its efforts on construction. So far it has constructed port facilities, military buildings and an airstrip on the islands, with recent imagery showing evidence of two more airstrips under construction. The installations bolster China's foothold in the Spratly Islands.

The new islands allow China to harness a portion of the sea for its own use that has been relatively out of reach until now. Although there are significant fisheries and possible large oil and gas reserves in the South China Sea, China's efforts serve to fortify its territorial claims.



Chinese construction at Gaven Reef, Spratly Islands



Chinese construction at Chigua Reef, Spratly Islands



Chinese construction at Fiery Cross Reef, Spratly Islands



Chinese construction at Calderon Reef, Spratly Islands



Chinese construction at Cross Reef, Spratly Islands

China built the airstrip on Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands (shown above) without consulting the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei or Taiwan. These countries all claim the region where China is constructing artificial islands.

Beijing has repeatedly stated that its goals are largely humanitarian, Pacific nations – including the United States – urged China to stop its reclamation. According to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, that wish has been granted. 'China has already stopped,' he told reporters on 05 August 2015. 'You just take an airplane to take a look.'

While significant land reclamation work had taken place on Woody Island, it is also an island for legal purposes, meaning its status is less contentious than some of the features that China has expanded in the Spratlys, for example Subi Reef, which was submerged at high tide before the reclamation work took place.

1. **Fiery Cross Reef** - China is expanding construction of its facilities on Fiery Cross Reef. Beijing completed a 3,000 meter (9,800-foot) airstrip, long enough to accommodate most Chinese military aircraft. Two helipads, up to 10 satellite communications antennas, and one possible radar tower are also present.
2. **South Johnson Reef** - One of the first facilities to finish principal land reclamation. A radar tower was built at the north end of the land mass. A new large multi-level military facility was built in the center of the island. Up to six surveillance towers were constructed alongside four possible weapons towers.
3. **Mischief Reef** - Mischief Reef located in the Spratlys has seen extensive reclamation activity. The widening of the southern entrance to the reef, coupled with sightings of Chinese navy vessels, suggested a future role for the reclaimed reef as a naval base.
4. **Gaven Reef** - Construction on Gaven Reef began in 2014, with a total of 114,000 square meters of land already created. A new artificial island was created between March and August 2014.

"Shelving disputes and carrying out joint development" had been China's basic position on the South China Sea issue. Elizabeth C. Economy notes that "In 2010, Xi chaired the leading group responsible for the country's South China Sea policy, which broadened its definition of China's core interests to include its expansive claims to maritime territory in the South China Sea. Since then, he has used everything from the Chinese navy to fishing boats to try to secure these claims ... "

In 2010, China issued an important statement concerning its core interests. Among its core interests was included the "Near Seas" to include the South China Sea (SCS), the East China Sea, and the Yellow Sea. The claim to sovereignty over these seas included the islands, fisheries, and subterranean minerals housed in them.

The South China Sea adjoins Guangdong and Hainan Provinces, and Guangxi municipality. The South China Sea is situated in the tropical and sub-tropical zones. It has a vast water area (some 3,500,000 km²) and contains a variety of aquatic species, yet fishing grounds are rather scattered.

What about the Future?

It may make sense to believe that the Spratley Islands will be an easier-to-find destination when the construction dust settles. If that translates into more access for ham DXpeditions is another matter. The Spratlys appear to be fortified as military installations which may diminish interest in their attractiveness as DX destinations.

The Paracel Islands, however, are another issue entirely. Construction work in the Paracels may signal an opportunity for the creation of a new DXCC counter.

Ditto for Macclesfield Bank and Subi Reef which are currently underwater at high tide. Adding an artificial structure to the Bank and the Reef may permanently raise them above sea level and thus transform them into new DXCC opportunities. We shall see what the future holds.

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